

10: The Mystique of Solicitude

The consumer society is not simply characterized by the abundance of goods and services but by the more important fact that in this society *everything is a service*. What is available to be consumed never presents itself as pure and simple product, but as a *personal service*, as gratification. From 'Guinness is good for you', via the receptionist's smile and the automatic cigarette machine's 'thank-you', to the politicians' deep concern for their fellow citizens, each of us is beset by a formidable obligingness, surrounded by a conspiracy of devotion and goodwill. The tiniest bar of soap is presented as the fruit of the thinking of a whole council of experts who have been poring for months over the softness of *your* skin. Airborne puts its entire management team at the service of your 'bottom':

For this is the crux. That is our prime area of study... Our business is seating you. Anatomically, socially and, almost, philosophically. All our chairs are the product of detailed observation of your person... If a chair has a polyester seat, that is all the better to hug the delicate curve of your posterior, etc.

This chair is no longer a chair, it is a total social service for your benefit.

Nothing is purely and simply consumed today -- that is to say, bought, possessed and used for particular ends. Objects no longer serve *a purpose*; first and foremost they serve *you*. Without this direct object, the personalized 'you', without this total ideology of personal service, consumption would not be what it is. It is the warmth of *gratification*, of personal allegiance which gives it its whole meaning -- not *satisfaction* pure and simple. It is in the sun of this solicitude that modern consumers bask.

Social Transfers and Maternal Transference

In all modern societies, this system of gratification and solicitude has its official support structure in the form of all the institutions of social redistribution (social security, pension funds, subsidies, insurances, grants and the various benefits) by which, as F. Perroux argues,

the public authorities have been induced to correct the excesses of the powers of the monopolies by providing social allocations aimed at satisfying needs and not at remunerating productive services. These latter transfers, for which nothing is apparently rendered in return, in the long term reduce the aggressiveness of the so-called dangerous classes.

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We shall not discuss the real efficacy of this redistribution here, or the economic mechanisms by which it is effected. What concerns us is the collective psychological mechanism it brings into play. Thanks to their tax levies and their economic transfers, the social authorities (in other words, the established order) arrogate to themselves the psychological benefit of appearing generous, present themselves in a charitable light. A whole maternal, protectionist lexicon is deployed to refer to these institutions: social security, insurance, family allowance, old-age cover, unemployment benefit. This bureaucratic 'charity', these mechanisms of 'collective solidarity' -- all of them 'hard-won social gains' -- thus act, through the *ideological* operation of redistribution, as mechanisms of *social control*. It is as though a certain part of surplus value were sacrificed to preserve the rest [104](#) -- the overall system of power sustaining itself with this ideology of

munificence in which the `benefit' bestowed conceals the profit taken. This kills two birds with one stone: the wage-earner is quite pleased to receive in the guise of gifts or `free' services a part of what has previously been taken from him.

This is, in short, what J.M. Clarke refers to as the `pseudo-market society'. In spite of their commercial spirit, Western societies protect their cohesion by social security legislation, the correction of initial inequalities and various priority allocations. The principle underlying all these measures is an extra-mercantile solidarity. The means is a judicious use of a certain dose of constraint for transfers which in themselves obey not the principles of equivalence, but the rules of a gradually rationalizing redistributive economy.

More generally, it is, in Perroux's view, true of every commodity that

it is the nexus not only of industrial processes, but of relational, institutional, transferential and cultural ones. In an organized society, people cannot purely and simply exchange commodities. What they hand over to each other are symbols, significations, services and information. Every commodity must be regarded as the nexus of non-chargeable services which qualify it socially.

Now this point, which is correct, means, if we turn it around, that no exchange, no prestation in our society of whatever type is `free', that the venality of exchange, even exchange of the most apparently disinterested kind, is universal. Everything is bought and sold, but market society cannot concede this either theoretically or legally. Hence the crucial ideological significance of the `social' mode of redistribution: this induces in the collective mentality the myth of a social order entirely devoted to `service' and the well-being of individuals. [105](#)

The Pathos of the Smile

However, alongside the economic and political institutions, there is a whole other -- more informal, non-institutional -- system of social relations which interests us more precisely here. This is that entire network

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of `personalized' communication which is invading everyday consumption. For we are indeed talking of consumption here -- the consumption of human relations, of solidarity, reciprocity, warmth and social participation standardized in the form of services -- a continual consumption of solicitude, sincerity and warmth, but consumption in fact only of the *signs* of that solicitude, which is even more vital for the individual than biological nourishment in a system where social distance and the atrociousness of social relations are the objective rule.

The loss of (spontaneous, reciprocal, symbolic) human relations is the fundamental fact of our societies. It is on this basis that we are seeing the systematic reinjection of human relations -- in the form of *signs* -- into the social circuit, and are seeing the *consumption* of those relations and of that human warmth *in signified form*. The receptionist, the social worker, the public relations consultant, the advertising pin-up girl, all these apostles of the social machine have as their secular mission the gratification, *the lubrication of social relations with the institutional smile*. Everywhere we see advertising aping intimate, intimist, personal styles of communication. It attempts to speak to the housewife in the language of the housewife next door, to speak to the executive or the secretary as a boss or a colleague, to speak to each of us as our friend or our

superego or as an inner voice in the confessional mode. It thus produces intimacy where there is none -- either among people or between people and products -- by a veritable process of simulation. And it is this, among other things (though perhaps this above all), which is consumed in advertising.

The whole of group dynamics and similar practices arise out of the same (political) objective or the same (vital) necessity: the accredited psycho-sociologist is well paid to reinject solidarity, exchange and communication into opaque intra-company relationships.

So it is with the whole tertiary sector of **services**. With the shopkeeper, the bank clerk, the salesgirl or the representative, in information services, sales promotion, all these jobs in the packaging, marketing and merchandising of human relations, not forgetting the sociologist, the interviewer, the impresario and the salesman, whose professional rule is one of 'contact', 'participation' and 'gaining the psychological involvement' of others -- in all these sectors of employment and roles, the connotation of reciprocity and 'warmth' is written into the planning and exercise of the function. It is the key asset in job-finding, promotion and salary level. Having 'human qualities', 'interpersonal skills', 'warmth', etc. We are surrounded by waves of fake spontaneity, 'personalized' language, orchestrated emotions and personal relations. 'Keep smiling'. *Seid nett miteinander!*:

The smile of Sofitel-Lyon is the smile we hope to see on your face when you step through our door. It is the smile of everyone who has already spent an enjoyable time at one of our hotels ... It is the demonstration of our hotel philosophy -- service with a smile.

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Or there is operation *verres de l'amitié* [literally: friendship glasses]:

Verres de l'amitié, with a dedication from the great names of stage, screen, sport and journalism, will serve as 'free gifts' to be given away with the products of firms which choose to make a donation to the French Medical Research Foundation... Among the personalities who have signed and decorated the *verres de l'amitié* are the racing driver Jean-Pierre Beltoise, the cyclist Louison Bobet, Yves Saint-Martin, Bourvil, Maurice Chevalier, Bernard Buffet, Jean Marais and the explorer Paul-Émile Victor.

Or TWA:

We are handing out a million dollars in bonuses to those among our employees who have surpassed themselves serving you! This hand-out depends on you, our contented passengers. We ask you to vote for the TWA employees who have really delighted you with their service!

A tentacular superstructure which goes far beyond the simple functionality of social exchange to form a 'philosophy', a value system for our technocratic society.

'Playtime' or the Parody of Services

This huge system of solicitude is based on a total contradiction. Not only can it not mask the iron law of market society, the objective truth of social relations, which is competition -- social distance increasing with urban and industrial concentration and crowding -- and, most

importantly, the spread of the abstraction of exchange-value into the very heart of daily life and the most personal relationships, but this system, in spite of appearances, is **itself a system of production**. It is the production of communication, of human relations in the service sector style. What it produces is sociability. Now, as a system of production, it cannot but obey the same laws as those of the mode of production of material goods. It cannot but reproduce in its very functioning the social relations it aims to transcend. Though designed to produce solicitude, it is condemned simultaneously to produce -- and reproduce -- distance, non-communication, opacity and atrocity.

This basic contradiction makes itself felt in all the fields of 'functionalized' human relations. Precisely because this new sociality, this 'radiant' solicitude, this warm 'ambience' no longer has anything spontaneous about it, because it is produced institutionally and industrially, it would be astonishing if the social and economic truth of it did not show through in its very *tone*. And it is indeed this distortion we find everywhere: everywhere this bureaucratic system of solicitude is skewed by, shot through with, aggressiveness, sarcasm and involuntary (black) humour, and everywhere the services rendered, the obligingness are subtly combined with frustration and parody. And everywhere, linked to this contradiction, one feels the *fragility* of this general system of gratification, and that it is always about to malfunction and collapse (which does indeed happen occasionally).

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We are touching here on one of the deep contradictions of our so-called 'affluent' society: that between the notion of 'service', which has feudal origins and traditions, and the dominant democratic values. The serf or feudal servant served 'in good faith', without any mental reservations: however, the system is already visibly in crisis in Swift's *Directions to Servants* (1745), in which the servants, united on the margins of their masters' society, form a society apart, a parasitic, cynical, parodic and sarcastic society. This is the collapse, where the manners of the day were concerned, of the fealty-based society of 'service': it leads to a fierce hypocrisy, to a kind of latent, shamefaced class struggle, to reciprocal shameless exploitation between masters and servants under cover of a system of values which, formally, has not changed.

Today we have democratic values: as a result, there is an irresolvable contradiction at the level of 'services', the provision of which is irreconcilable with the formal equality of persons. The only outcome is a generalized social **game** (for it is everyone's lot today -- and not just in private life but also in their social and occupational practice -- to receive or provide services. Everyone is, to a greater or lesser extent, everyone else's tertiary sector). This social game of human relations in a bureaucratic society differs from the fierce hypocrisy of Swift's domestics. It is a gigantic 'simulation model' of the absent reciprocity. We no longer have dissimulation here, but functional simulation. The vital minimum of social communication is only achieved by this pressurized relational 'performance', in which everyone is engaged. It is a magnificent *trompel'oeil*, l'oeil, designed to smooth over the objective hostility and distance inherent in all present relationships.

Our world of 'services' is still largely Swift's world. The spite of the functionary, the aggressiveness of the bureaucrat are archaic forms that are still Swiftian in inspiration. For example, the servility of the ladies' hairdresser, the deliberate, unreserved importunity of the commercial traveller are still violent, forced, caricatural forms of the service relationship. There is a rhetoric of servility in which an alienated form of *personal* relationship nonetheless shows through, as it did between Swift's masters and servants. The way the bank clerk, the bellboy or the postmistress express, by their acrimony or their hyper-devotion, that they are paid to do what

they do is the very thing that makes them human, personal and irreducible to the system. Their coarseness, insolence, affected reserve, calculated slowness, open aggressiveness or, conversely, their excessive respect is plainly and simply that which, within them, is battling against the contradiction of having to embody, *as though it were natural*, a systematic devotion for which they are also paid. Hence the unwholesome ambience, constantly verging on veiled aggression, of this exchange of `services' *in which the real persons resist the functional `personalization' of the exchanges*.

But this is merely an archaic residue: the true functional relationship today has resolved all tension. The `functional' service relationship is no

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longer violent, hypocritical or sado-masochistic; it is openly warm, spontaneously personalized and definitively pacified. We find it in the extraordinary, vibrant atonality of the announcers at major airports or on TV; in the atonal smile, so `sincere' and calculated (though, ultimately, it is neither of these things for it is no longer a question of sincerity or cynicism here, but of `functionalized' human relations, cleansed of all temperamental or psychological aspects, cleansed of all real, affective harmonics, and reconstituted on the basis of the calculated vibrations of the ideal relationship -- in a word, freed from any violent moral dialectic of being and appearance, and restored to the simple functionality of the *system* of relations).

We are still, in our service consuming society, at the crossroads of these two orders. This was very well illustrated by Jacques Tati's film *Playtime*, which moved from traditional, cynical sabotage, the wicked parodying of services (the whole episode in the fancy restaurant, with the cold fish passing from one table to another, the malfunctioning systems, all the perversion of `reception structures', and the breakdown of a world that is simply too new) to the useless instrumental functionality of reception rooms, armchairs and pot-plants, glass façades and `impeccable' communication, all in the icy solicitude of the countless gadgets and a perfect ambience.

Advertising and the Ideology of the Gift

The social function of advertising is to be understood in the same extra-economic perspective as the ideology of the gift, of free offers and service. For advertising is not merely sales promotion or the use of suggestion for economic ends. It is perhaps not even these things *first and foremost* (its economic effectiveness is increasingly being questioned): the specific message of `the language of advertising' is the denial of the economic rationality of commodity exchange under the auspices of a general exemption from payment. [106](#)

That exemption assumes minor economic dimensions in the form of reductions, discounts and free gifts, all the little `gizmos' and `freebies' offered when one makes a purchase. The profusion of free offers, games, competitions and bargains is the outer trappings of promotional activity, its external aspect, as it appears to the ordinary housewife. An identikit picture:

In the morning, the housewife/consumer throws back the shutters of her house -- that happy house she has won in the Floraline competition. She takes her tea from the splendid Persian-style breakfast cups she got with Triscottes (only 9 francs 90 plus five tokens). She puts on a little dress -- a bargain from 3J (20 per cent off) and sets off to the Prisunic, not forgetting her Prisu

Card which allows her to make cashless purchases... No problem finding a main course! At the supermarket she played the Buitoni magic lantern game and won 40 centimes off a tin of *poulet impérial* (5 francs 90). And, for her son,

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something cultural: the Peter Van Hought painting free with Persil soap powder. Thanks to Kellogg's Corn Flakes, he has built himself an airport. In the afternoon, to relax, she puts on a record, a Brandenburg Concerto. The LP cost her 8 francs with the San Pellegrino three-pack. In the evening, a great new experience: a colour TV loaned free of charge by Philips for three days (simply on approval, no obligation to buy), etc.

'I sell less and less washing powder and more and more gifts,' sighs the marketing director of a detergent manufacturer.

These are just the little touches, the window dressing of public relations. The point is, however, that the whole of advertising is merely a gigantic extrapolation of this 'something extra'. In advertising, the little daily gratuities assume the dimensions of a total social fact. Advertising is something 'bestowed'. It is a continual free offer to and for everyone. It is the prestigious image of affluence, but above all it is the repeated gage of the virtual miracle of 'something for nothing'. Its social function is, therefore, that of a public relations sector. We know how public relations proceeds: the works visit (Saint-Gobain), executive refresher courses in Louis XIII chateaux, the photogenic smile of the MD, artworks in the factories, group dynamics: 'the task of a **PR** man is to maintain a harmony of mutual interests between public and managers.' In the same way, it is the function of advertising in all its forms to set in place a *social fabric* ideologically unified under the auspices of a collective super-patronage, a kindly super-feudality, which provides all these 'extras' the way aristocrats laid on feasts for their people. Through advertising, which is already a social service in itself, all products are presented as services, all real economic processes are staged and reinterpreted socially as effects of giving, of personal allegiance and affective relations. No matter that this munificence, like that of potentates, is only ever a functional redistribution of a part of the profits. The trick of advertising is precisely to *substitute everywhere the magic of the cargo cult* (the total, miraculous abundance the natives dream of) *for the logic of the market*.

All the artful moves of advertising tend in this direction. See how discreet it is everywhere, how benevolent, self-effacing and disinterested. An hour's radio programme against a one-minute '**ad**' for its product. Four pages of poetic prose and the company trademark placed shame-facedly(?) at the foot of a page. And all its games with itself, piling on the self-effacement and the 'anti-advertising' parodies. The blank page for the millionth Volkswagen: 'We can't show it to you. We've just sold it.' All these things, which could be included in a history of the rhetoric of advertising, are logically deducible from advertising's need to distance itself completely from the level of economic constraints and to fuel the fiction of a game, a party, a charitable institution, a disinterested social service. The conspicuous display of disinterestedness plays its part as a social function of wealth (Veblen) and an integrating factor. And even a play of aggressiveness towards the consumer -- antiphrasis -- is

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admissible. All is possible and everything works, though not so much to sell as to restore consensus, complicity, *collusion* -- in short, here again, to produce relationship, cohesion,

communication. The fact that the consensus produced by advertising can *then* result in attachment to objects, acts of purchase and implicit conformity to the economic imperatives of consumption is certain, but it is not the essential point. And, at any event, that economic function of advertising is *consequent* upon its overall social function. This is indeed why it is never safely assured. [107](#)

The Shop-Window

The shop-window -- all shop-windows -- which are, with advertising, the foci of our urban consumer practices, are also the site *par excellence* of that 'consensus operation', that communication and exchange of values through which an entire society is homogenized by incessant daily acculturation to the silent and spectacular logic of fashion. That specific space which is the shop-window -- neither inside nor outside, neither private nor wholly public, and which is already the street while maintaining, behind the transparency of its glass, the distance, the opaque status of the commodity -- is also the site of a specific social relation. Tracking along the shop-windows, with their *calculated riot of colour*, which is always at the same time a frustration, this hesitation-waltz of shopping is the Kanak dance in which goods are exalted before being exchanged. Objects and products are offered there in a glorious *mise-en-scène*, a sacralizing ostentation (this is not a pure and simple displaying, any more than is the case in advertising, but, as G. Lagneau says, a 'setting-off', a 'showcasing'). This symbolic giving, aped by the objects themselves on their stage-set, this symbolic, silent exchange between the proffered object and the gaze, is clearly an invitation to real, economic exchange inside the shop. But not necessarily, and at any event the communication which is established at the level of the shop-window is not so much between individuals and objects as a generalized communication between all individuals, not via the contemplation of the same objects but via the reading and recognition in the same objects of the same system of signs and the same hierarchical code of values. It is this acculturation, this training, which takes place at every moment everywhere in the streets, on the walls and in the underground stations, on advertising hoardings and neon signs. Shop-windows thus beat out the rhythm of the social process of value: they are a continual adaptability test for everyone, a test of managed projection and integration. The big stores are a kind of pinnacle of this urban process, a positive laboratory and social testing ground, where, as Durkheim writes in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, the collectivity reinforces its cohesion, as in feasts and spectacles.

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Therapeutic Society

The ideology of a society which is continually taking care of you culminates in the ideology of a society which is actually treating you medically, as a potential patient. The social body surely must be thought rather ill then, and its citizen consumers rather fragile -- always on the verge of collapse, of becoming unhinged -- for this 'therapeutic' discourse to be so widespread among professionals, in the public prints and among analytical moralists.

Bleustein-Blanchet: 'In my view, Gallup polls are an indispensable gauge of opinion, which the advertiser must use, like a *doctor* calling for tests and X-rays.'

An ad man: 'What the client is looking for is security. He needs to be reassured, taken care of. At times you are a father to him, at times a mother or a son.' 'Our profession is akin to the art of medicine.' 'We're like medics, we give advice. We don't force anything on anyone.' 'My job is a

vocation, like a doctor's.'

Architects, advertising executives, town planners, designers all see themselves as demiurges or, rather, as *thaumaturges* of social relations and the environment. 'People live in ugliness': this we have to cure. Psycho-sociologists, too, see themselves as *therapists* of human and social communication. This is even true of industrialists, who present themselves as missionaries of well-being and general prosperity. 'Society is sick': this is the refrain of all the well-meaning souls in power. The consumer society is a canker; 'we have to give it back some soul,' says M. Chaban-Delmas. It must be said that this great myth of the Sick Society, a myth which evacuates all analysis of the real contradictions, is one those contemporary medicine-men the intellectuals very largely connive in. They, however, tend to locate society's ills at a fundamental level. Hence their prophetic pessimism. Professionals, in general, tend rather to maintain the myth of the Sick Society, as a society that is sick not so much organically (in which case it would be incurable) but functionally, at the level of its interchanges and metabolism. Hence their dynamic optimism: it only has to be cured to re-establish the *functionality* of interchanges, to speed up the metabolism (that is to say, once again, to inject communication, relationship, contact, human balance, warmth, efficiency and the controlled smile). These are all tasks they undertake cheerfully and profitably.

The Ambiguity and Terrorism of Solicitude

What has to be stressed about this whole liturgy of solicitude is its profound ambiguity. An ambiguity which coincides very exactly with the double meaning of the verb 'to solicit':

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1 The dimension of 'solicitude', in the 'caring', 'favouring', 'mothering' sense. The **gift**.

2 The opposite meaning it assumes in the sense of '**requesting**' (soliciting a reply), 'demanding', or even 'commandeering'. This is a sense which is even more clearly seen in the modern usage of the term ('soliciting information', etc.). What is involved here is a diverting, a seizing of something; turning it to one's own ends. This is precisely the opposite of what is meant by solicitude.

Now, the function of all the apparatuses of solicitude, institutional or otherwise (public relations, advertising, etc.), which surround us -- and are, indeed, proliferating -- is both to care for and to satisfy, on the one hand, and surreptitiously to gain by enticement and abduction on the other. The average consumer is always *subjected* to this two-pronged undertaking. He is solicited in every sense of the word -- the ideology of the gift which is conveyed by 'solicitude' serving always as an alibi for the real conditioning which is that of his 'solicitation' or entreaty. [108](#)

This rhetoric of thaumaturgy and solicitude which stamps the consumer society, the affluent society, with a particular emotional tone has precise social functions:

1 The emotional re-education of individuals isolated within bureaucratic society by the technical and social division of labour and by the parallel technical and social division -- *itself equally total and bureaucratic* -- of consumption practices.

2 A political strategy of formal integration which covers -- and covers up for -- the failings of the

political institutions: just as universal suffrage, referendums and parliamentary institutions are designed to establish a social consensus through *formal* participation, so advertising, fashion, human and public relations can be interpreted as a kind of *perpetual referendum* -- in which citizen consumers are entreated [*sollicités*] at every moment to pronounce in favour of a certain code of values and implicitly to sanction it. This *informal* system of mobilization of assent is safer: it leaves practically no way of saying 'no' (admittedly, the political referendum is also a democratic staging of the affirmative response). In every country today we see 'participationist' modes of integration taking over from the *violent* processes of social control (repressive, state, political constraints). This they do, first, in the parliamentary, electoral form, and, subsequently, through the informal processes of *solicitation* we are discussing. It would be interesting to analyse in this light the 'public relations' operation mounted by Publicis/Saint-Gobain in the great sociological event that was Boussois's hostile takeover bid for Saint-Gobain: public opinion was mobilized, and called upon as a witness and a 'psychological stakeholder' in the operation. In the objective restructuring of the capitalist enterprise, the public found itself, under the guise of 'democratic' information, integrated as jury, and, through the symbolic

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group of the shareholders in Saint-Gobain, manipulated as an actor in the drama. One can see how advertising activity, understood in the broadest sense, can shape and totalize social processes, how it can substitute itself daily -- and no doubt even more effectively -- for the electoral system in psychological mobilization and control. A whole new political strategy is coming into being at this level, contemporaneous with the objective development of the 'technostructure' and monopoly productivism.

3 'Political' control by solicitation and solicitude is accompanied by a more intimate control over motivations themselves. This is where the term 'solicit' assumes its double meaning, and it is in this sense that all solicitude is basically *terroristic*. Let us examine the admirable example of advertising which runs: 'When a girl tells you she adores Freud, what she means is that she loves comic strips: 'a girl is a "little wild thing", full of contradictions. Now, beyond these contradictions, it is up to us, advertisers, to understand that girl. More generally, to understand the people whom we wish to address.' People, then, are incapable of understanding themselves, of knowing what they are and what they want, but we are there to do that. We know better than you do about yourselves. A repressive position of paternalistic analysis. And the ultimate ends of this 'higher understanding' are clear: 'Understanding people in order to be understood by them. Knowing how to speak to them in order to be heard by them. Knowing how to please them in order to interest them. In short, knowing how to sell them a product -- your product. This is what we call "communication".' A marketing trick? Not just that. This girl *has no right to like Freud*. She is wrong and, for her own good, we are going to foist upon her what it is that she secretly likes. The whole of the social inquisition is here, the whole of psychological repression. Advertising in general does not admit these things so clearly. Yet, at every moment, it operates the same mechanisms of charitable and repressive control.

It is the same with the advert for TWA: 'the airline which understands you'. And just look how it understands you:

We cannot bear to think of you all alone in your hotel room, frantically twiddling the controls of your TV... We'll do everything we can to enable you to take your better half with you on your next business trip, with our special family tariff etc. With your better half alongside you, at least you'll have someone to change channels... That's what love is.

There is no question of being alone then. You don't have the right to be alone: 'We cannot bear the idea.' If you don't know what it is to be happy, we'll teach you. We know better than you. And even how to make love: your better half is your erotic 'second channel'. You didn't realize that? We'll teach you that too. We are there to understand you. That is our role.

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Sociometric Compatibility

Sociability or the ability to 'relate to people', to sustain relationships, to stimulate exchanges, to intensify the social metabolism, becomes in this society a mark of 'personality'. Consuming, spending and following fashion and, through these things, communicating with others is behaviour which forms a keystone of the contemporary sociometric 'personality' outlined by David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd*. The whole system of gratification and solicitude is, in fact, merely the affective modulation (itself functionalized) of a system of relations in which the status of the individual is changing totally. To enter the cycle of consumption and fashion is not simply to surround oneself with objects and services as one pleases; it is to change one's being and directedness. It is to move from an individual principle based on autonomy, character, the inherent value of the self to a principle of perpetual recycling by indexation to a code in which the value of the individual becomes rational, diffracted, changeable: it is the code of 'personalization', which no individual himself possesses, but which traverses each individual in his signified relation to the others. The person as a determining instance disappears and is replaced by personalization. From this point on, the individual is no longer a centre of autonomous values, but merely the expression of multiple relations in a process of shifting interrelationships. 'The other-directed person is, in a sense, at home everywhere and nowhere, capable of a rapid if sometimes superficial intimacy with and response to everyone.' [109](#) He is, in fact, caught in the toils of a kind of sociometric graph and is perpetually redefined by his position in these bizarre spiders' webs (these threads which connect A, B, C, D, E, in a web of positive, negative, unilateral and bilateral relations). He is, in short, a sociometric being, whose definition is that he is *at the point of intersection with others*.

This is not simply an 'ideal' model. *This immanence of others, and this immanence in others*, governs all status behaviour (and hence the whole field of consumption) according to a process of unlimited interrelationship, where there is not, strictly speaking, any individualized Subject with its 'freedom', or 'Others' in the Sartrean sense of the term, but a generalized 'ambience', in which the relative terms only assume meaning by their differential mobility. The same tendency can be read at the level of the objects/elements and their combinatorial manipulation in modern interiors. In this new type of integration, then, it is a matter not of 'conformism' or 'non-conformism' (although these terms are still constantly found in journalistic language, they relate to traditional bourgeois society), but of optimum sociality, *of maximum compatibility with others* and with the various situations and professions (retraining, versatility), of mobility at all levels. To be universally 'mobile', dependable and versatile: that is what 'culture' is in the era of human engineering. So, molecules form on the basis of the multiple valencies of particular atoms;

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they can be unformed and reorganized differently or turned into large, complex molecules. This adaptive capacity coincides with a social mobility which is different from the rise of the 'traditional' parvenu or self-made man. There is no severing of ties in the course of making one's

individual career, no breaking out of one's class to make one's way, no meteoric rise. It is, rather, a question of *being mobile with everyone else*, and rising up the coded rungs of a strictly demarcated hierarchical ladder.

There is, indeed, no question of not being mobile: mobility is a warrant of morality. We also have here, then, in every case, an enforced *mobilization*. And the unceasing compatibility is also an *accounting* [*comptabilité*]: in other words, the individual, who is defined as the sum of his relations, of his 'valencies', is also always accountable as such: he becomes a unit of calculation and enters voluntarily into a sociometric (or political) plan/calculation.

Proving Oneself and Approval (*Werbung und Bewährung*)

In this network of anxious relations, in which there is no longer any absolute value, but only functional compatibility, it is no longer a question of 'asserting oneself', of 'proving oneself' (*Bewährung*), but of relating to and gaining the approval of others, soliciting their judgement and their positive affinity. This mystique of gaining approval is everywhere gradually supplanting the mystique of proving oneself. The traditional individual's objective of transcendent accomplishment is giving way to processes of reciprocal solicitation (in the sense in which we defined it above: *Werbung*). Everyone 'solicits' and manipulates, everyone is solicited and manipulated.

This is the foundation of the new *morality*, in which individualistic or ideological values give way to a kind of *generalized relativity*, of receptivity and agreement, of anxious communication -- others must 'speak to' you (and *speak you*: they must address you, but must also express you and say what you are), love you, rally round you. We have seen the orchestration of this in advertising, which does not so much seek to inform you (or even, in the end, to mystify you) as to 'speak to' you. 'It is not important,' writes Riesman, 'whether Johnny plays with a truck or in the sandbox, but it matters very much whether he involves himself with Bill -- via any object at all.' [110](#) We are reaching a point where the group is less interested in what it produces than in the human relations within it. Its essential work may be, more or less, to *produce relationship*, and to consume this as it goes along. This process may even suffice to define a group quite apart from any external objective. The concept of 'ambience' sums all this up quite well: 'ambience' is the diffuse sum of relations, produced and consumed by the group -- the presence of the group to itself. If it does not exist, it can be programmed and produced industrially. This is, indeed, the most common case.

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In its broadest sense, which goes well beyond common usage, this concept of ambience is characteristic of the consumer society which may be defined as follows:

1 Values related to 'objectives' and transcendence (final, ideological values) give way to ambience-related (relational, immanent, objectiveless) values, which exhaust themselves in the moment of relating ('consumed' values).

2 The consumer society is simultaneously a society of the production of goods and of the *accelerated production of relations*. Indeed, this latter is the defining aspect. This production of relations, which is still craft-based at the intersubjective level or the level of primary groups, is, however, tending gradually to become aligned to the mode of production of material goods or, in

other words, to the generalized industrial mode. It then becomes, by this same logic, the province (if not, indeed, the monopoly) of specialized (private or national) enterprises, and indeed constitutes their social and commercial *raison d'être*. The consequences of this development are as yet difficult to foretell. It is difficult to accept that (human, social, political) relationships are produced in the same way as objects, and that, once they come to be produced in that same way, they become, similarly, objects of consumption. Yet this is, in fact, the case. But we are merely at the beginning of a long process here. [111](#)

Cult of Sincerity -- Functional Tolerance

For it to be produced and consumed, relating must -- like material goods, like labour power, and according to the same logic -- be 'liberated', 'emancipated'. In other words, it must free itself from all the traditional social conventions and rituals. This marks the end of courtesy and etiquette, which are incompatible with generalized functional relations. But the disappearance of etiquette does not mean that we come to relate spontaneously to one another. Our relating simply falls under the sway of industrial production and fashion. But because it is the opposite of spontaneity, it will imperiously take over all the marks of that spontaneity. Riesman has noted this in his description of the 'cult of sincerity'. [112](#) This is a mystique parallel to those of 'warmth' and 'solicitude' we have discussed above, as of all the *obligatory* signs and rites of absent communication: '[This] yearning for sincerity is a grim reminder of how little they can trust themselves or others in daily life.' [113](#)

It is, in fact, the ghost of lost sincerity which haunts all this contact-based friendliness, these perpetual 'live link-ups', this aping and forcing of dialogue at all costs. The authentic relationship is lost, long live sincerity! Behind this obsession with 'honest pricing', with sporting, sentimental and political fair play, with the 'simple ways of the "great and the good"', the straight-talking confessions of cinema or other idols, or telephoto-lens shots of the daily life of royal families -- and in this

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frantic demand for sincerity (like that for seeing the materials in modern building) -- there is perhaps also (from a more 'sociological' point of view) the acculturated classes' immense mistrust of -- and immense reaction against -- traditional culture and rites, of whatever kind, which have always served to mark social distance. A massive obsession, which runs through the whole of mass culture -- a class expression of the *déclassés* of culture: the fear of being had, of being duped and manipulated by signs as they have been historically over centuries -- or, alternatively, the fear or rejection of high, ceremonial culture, a fear repressed beneath the myth of a culture of the 'natural' and of instant communication.

At all events, in this industrial culture of sincerity, it is still the *signs* of sincerity which are consumed. And that sincerity is no longer opposed to cynicism or hypocrisy as it was with in the register of being and appearance. In the field of functional relations, cynicism and sincerity *alternate* without contradicting each other, in the same manipulation of signs. Naturally, the moral schema (sincerity & equals; good; artificiality & equals; evil) still operates, but it no longer connotes real qualities. It now connotes only the difference between the *signs* of sincerity and the signs of artificiality.

The problem of 'tolerance' (liberalism, laxism, the 'permissive society', etc.) takes the same

form. The fact that those who were once mortal enemies are now on speaking terms, that the most fiercely opposed ideologies 'enter into dialogue', that a kind of peaceful coexistence has set in at all levels, that morality is less strict than it was, in no sense signifies some 'humanist' progress in human relations, a greater understanding of problems or any such airy nonsense. It indicates simply that, since ideologies, opinions, virtues and vices are ultimately merely material for exchange and communication, all contradictory elements are equivalent in the play of signs. Tolerance in this context is no longer either a psychological trait or a virtue: *it is a modality of the system itself*. It is like the total compatibility and elasticity of the elements of fashion: long skirts and mini-skirts 'tolerate' each other very well (indeed they signify nothing other than the relationship which holds between them).

Tolerance connotes morally the generalized relativity of functions/ signs, objects/signs, beings/signs, relations/signs, ideas/signs. In fact, we are beyond the opposition between fanaticism and tolerance, as we are beyond that between sincerity and fakery. 'Moral' tolerance is no greater than it was before. We have simply changed systems; we have moved on to functional compatibility.

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11: Anomie in the Affluent Society

Violence

The consumer society is at one and the same time a society of solicitude and a society of repression, a pacified society and a society of violence. We have seen that 'pacified' daily life thrives on a daily diet of consumed violence, 'allusive' violence: news reports of accidents, murders, revolutions, the atomic or bacteriological threat -- the whole apocalyptic stock-in-trade of the mass media. We have seen that the affinity between violence and the obsession with security and well-being is not accidental: 'spectacular' violence and the pacification of daily life are homogeneous, because they are each equally abstract and each is a thing of myths and signs. We might also add that violence is now a days inoculated into daily life in homoeopathic doses -- a vaccine against fatality -- to ward off the spectre of the *real* fragility of that pacified life. For it is no longer the spectre of scarcity which haunts the civilization of affluence, but the spectre of **fragility**. And that spectre, which is much more menacing because it concerns the very equilibrium of individual and collective structures, and which has to be warded off at all costs, is in fact kept at bay by this round about solution of consumed, packaged, homogenized violence. This violence is not dangerous violence: blood on the front page no more compromises the social and moral order than does sex (despite the emotional blackmail on the part of the censors who wish to persuade themselves of this, and to persuade us of it). It simply attests to the fact that the balance is a precarious one, that the social and moral order is made up of contradictions.

The real problem of violence arises elsewhere. It is the problem of the *real*, uncontrollable violence secreted by plenty and security once a certain threshold has been reached. This is no longer integrated violence, consumed with the rest, but the uncontrollable violence which well-being secretes in its very achievement. That violence is characterized (precisely like consumption as we have defined it, though not as superficially understood) by the fact that it is *aimless and objectless*. [114](#) It is because we base our lives on the traditional idea of the pursuit of well-being as a *rational* activity that the eruptive, unaccountable violence of the Stockholm youth gangs, of the Montreal riots, of the Los Angeles murderers, seems an incredible, incomprehensible manifestation and one which stands in apparent contradiction to social progress and affluence. It